



Sierra Leone

International Religious Freedom Report 2005

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there were two known incidents of religious intolerance during the period covered by this report.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 29,925 square miles, and its population is approximately 4.9 million. Reliable data on the exact numbers of those who practice major religions are not available; however, most sources estimate that the population is 60 percent Muslim, 30 percent Christian, and 10 percent practitioners of traditional indigenous religions. There is no information concerning the number of atheists in the country.

Many syncretistic practices reportedly exist, and many citizens practice a mixture of Islam and traditional indigenous religions or Christianity and traditional indigenous religions.

Historically, most Muslims have been concentrated in the northern areas of the country, and Christians were located in the south; however, the 11-year civil war, which officially was declared over in 2002, resulted in movement by major segments of the population.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state religion.

Religious holidays celebrated as national holidays include the Muslim Eid al-Adha, the Prophet Muhammed's birthday, and Eid al-Fitr holidays, and the Christian Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas holidays.

The Government has no requirements for recognizing, registering, or regulating religious groups.

The Government permits religious instruction in public schools. Students are allowed to choose whether to attend Muslim or Christian oriented classes.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

On January 1, 2005, the Immigration Department revised its annual registration fees for businessmen, teachers, missionaries,

and other groups of foreign residents. Fees for missionaries increased from approximately \$3 (10,000 leones) to approximately \$70 (200,000 leones). Some foreign missionaries complained that the increased immigration registration fee was a restriction.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom, and interfaith marriage is common. The Inter-Religious Council (IRC), composed of Christian and Muslim leaders, plays a vital role in civil society and actively participates in efforts to further the peace process in the country and the subregion. Christian and Muslim leaders worked together with the National Accountability Group and the Anti-Corruption Commission to address the problem of corruption in society.

On May 19, an altercation between an Anglican schoolteacher from St. Philip's Primary School and a Muslim woman began when the teacher and her students allegedly blocked the way of the Muslim woman who was trying to cross a street in East Freetown. The students reportedly taunted the Muslim woman, calling her a "debul" (a masked devil). When the woman started to fight the students, the students allegedly tore the woman's clothes and her veil. Approximately 20 Muslim men rescued the woman and threw objects at the Catholic school. Although police came to the scene, they made no arrests. On May 20, approximately 100 persons, mostly youths and allegedly carrying sticks, knives, and copies of the Qur'an, gathered outside St. Philip's Church to protest the previous day's incident. The group threw objects at the church and broke most of the building's windows. After the incident, church leaders cancelled Sunday religious services and closed the school. The IRC hosted a series of meetings between the two groups to discuss the issue. Church services resumed on May 29, and the school re-opened on June 2. The Inspector General of Police settled the dispute between the schoolteacher and the Muslim woman, and both signed an agreement that the matter had been resolved and no future action would be taken.

On April 21, a public holiday for the Prophet's Birthday, a group of Muslims in Rokupr burned the igbala (hut or shrine) where the local hunting society stored its traditional hunting masks so that the group could not stage its traditional parade. A local newspaper reported and police confirmed that the Muslims burned the masks because they believed that the pagan tradition was a desecration of the Prophet's birthday. Police arrested several persons after the incident and were still investigating the case at the end of the period covered by this report.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy continued to maintain frequent contact with the IRC and its individual members. In November 2004, the U.S. Ambassador hosted an Iftar for Muslims and Islamic leaders.

Released on November 8, 2005

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